

The month of May is Clear Air Month and it is a time to recognize the need for clean air and the need to take care of our environment. As the bright spring days warm into lazy summer afternoons, Americans spend more and more of their time outdoors. Whether it's a backyard barbeque, picnic in the park, fishing, hunting, or perhaps playing sports, there's no doubt that time outdoors would, at the very least, be much less pleasant without clean air.

Breathing polluted air has been linked to heart disease, cancer, stroke, and chronic respiratory diseases—four of the five leading causes of mortality in the United States today. Those individuals subjected to exceptionally poor air quality over long periods of time experience higher risks of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema, lung cancer, and heart problems.

Poor air quality is also one of the leading causes of asthma. An estimated 34.1 million Americans suffer from asthma, one of the most common ailments rooted in polluted air. Annual expenditures for healthcare and lost productivity due to this condition is estimated to be over \$20 billion. Approximately one in ten children suffers from asthma. The ailment is hardly unique to our country, with 300 million people suffering from asthma worldwide and 250,000 of those cases ending in death annually.

As we enter the summer months, I echo the advice of health care professionals who suggest that every individual consult their residential area's ozone levels in anticipation of outdoor activity and plan accordingly. Yet more urgently, I stress the importance of addressing this issue at its root by advocating for and engaging in environmentally-friendly activities that limit air pollution and encourage responsible and sustainable living. This could mean anything ranging from launching a clean air awareness campaign in your community to simply riding your bike to work. In the fight for clean air, no effort is insignificant.

Clean Air Month symbolizes the inherent connection between the health of the environment and the health of individuals. There is no better illustration of the principle that taking care of the Earth is taking care of ourselves. I ask you to join with me in recognizing Clean Air Month and working towards a cleaner, healthier, and better future for our nation and the world.